

CAP still flying high over Arizona

Volunteers keep tradition of service

By Joan Fudala
Special for The Republic

The Civil Air Patrol formed Dec. 1, 1941, six days before America was attacked at Pearl Harbor, then became a vital part of our World War II homeland defense.

Sixty years later, nearly 1,500 Arizonans are among 60,000 people in the United States who continue the CAP tradition of volunteer aviation service.

To several in the organization, the CAP seems to be a well-kept secret.

"Unless you're a pilot or hang out at airports or have a son or daughter in it, it's not well-known," said Layne Slapper, director of operations for the Arizona Wing of the CAP. "We get publicity when we're involved in a search; then people knock on our door."

Martin Miller, 76, a retired cardiologist who lives in Anthem, is one of a handful of surviving charter members of the CAP. His mother signed him up in 1941 (yes, he was only 16, having altered his birth certificate).

While home in Flushing, N.Y., on leave during World War II, he flew two submarine patrols along the East Coast. Over the past six decades, he's been an active member of CAP squadrons in New York, Massachusetts, Ohio and Florida.

He moved to Arizona in 1999 and was invited to become the Arizona Wing's medical officer, a position he continues to hold as a lieutenant colonel in the CAP.

"I don't fly as much anymore," Miller said.

He does recall the satisfaction of locating his first downed aircraft on the New Hampshire-Massachusetts line during a 1955 search-and-rescue mission.

"It's not always what you would call exciting — flying a grid, looking for a plane," he said.

Reflecting on his 60 years of service, Miller said, "Civil Air Patrol has made major steps, particularly in the cadet program and aerospace education. Our contact with the Air Force has become a lot stronger in the past year."

Scottsdale resident Bill Gott, 63, earned his private pilot license in Maryland in 1968, then looked for an aviation-related group to join so he could continue his family's tradition of volunteering and community service. Friends took him to a Civil Air Patrol meeting; he eventually became that unit's commander.

In 1977, he moved to Scottsdale, joined CAP Squadron 314 at Scottsdale Municipal Airport, served as its commander for nine years and continues to serve as the squadron's maintenance officer.

"I enjoy the flight activities, comradeship with the people in CAP, and hopefully we've done something for the community," said Gott, who retired last year from the city of Scottsdale's fleet maintenance department.

Gott said the Scottsdale CAP squadron — organized in 1967 and composed of about 35 senior members (no cadets) — has both ground and airborne roles.

"For search and rescue, we go where we think downed air-

craft are located," he said. "We do humanitarian missions for U.S. Customs, looking for people stranded in the desert, mostly in southern Arizona during the summer months. During the 100-year floods in the 1980s, we flew FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) folks to look at flood damage."

During his 33 years in the CAP, Gott has been a part of the organization's evolving mission.

"When I first joined, I was asked to go on a SAR (search-and-rescue mission) within two weeks, before I even had a uniform," he said. "Now there are a lot of courses and orientations members have to go through, mainly due to liability issues."

"Back then, our planes didn't have radios in them, and if we located a (downed) plane, we'd have to land somewhere and phone it in."

Glendale resident Slapper is a mission pilot and deputy commander for seniors of CAP Squadron 302 at Deer Valley Municipal Airport. In the CAP, Slapper holds the rank of lieutenant colonel; in his occupation, he is a lieutenant in the Glendale Police Department.

"I came into the Civil Air Patrol in 1986 as a low-time (private) pilot," Slapper said.

Flying with the CAP appealed to him because he didn't have much money to get additional flying hours on his own.

"It fulfills in me the need to provide a community service outside my police work," he said.

The Deer Valley CAP squadron started in 1957 at Luke Air Force Base and has grown into a composite unit of more than 40 senior members and 40 cadets.

In addition to his role as a mission pilot flying the squadron's Cessna 182, Slapper works with wing youth in the cadet program, having participated in 11 cadet summer encampments.

Slapper said young people join because they "enjoy the discipline, the programs, learning about the U.S. Air Force, learning about flying. They can even earn their glider license. Cadets also learn about search and rescue, first aid, ground search and rescue, camping and physical fitness."

Nearly 600 Arizona youths are active in the CAP cadet program. Their drill team performed for President Bush at this year's Memorial Day ceremony at Falcon Field. Many of the cadets go on to aviation or military careers.

FYI

The workings of the Civil Air Patrol:

- As the official U.S. Air Force auxiliary, the CAP is a civilian, volunteer, non-profit service organization through which its members perform more than 85 percent of U.S. inland search-and-rescue missions. The CAP also offers aerospace education through its Cadet Program.
 - Arizona's CAP wing was organized in 1942 and now includes 22 squadrons; 11 are in the Valley. Squadrons meet at local airfields, including Deer Valley, Scottsdale, Falcon Field, Williams Gateway, Sky Harbor International, Glendale and Luke Air Force Base.
 - Members fall into two categories: seniors (over 21) and cadets (ages 11-21). Senior members and cadets constantly train to assist in emergencies, such as downed aircraft and natural disasters. Senior members — pilots and ground personnel — share on-call duties to respond to requests from the Air Force's Rescue Coordination Center or Arizona's Division of Emergency Management.
 - The Arizona Wing has 14 Cessna 182 aircraft its members fly; some members are able to use their own aircraft on CAP missions.
 - Members receive no pay for their services; however, they are reimbursed for fuel used on required missions.
 - Local CAP members experienced the same national flight restrictions as news helicopters and general aviation in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks. In the first few weeks after the attacks, the CAP put its training and other government flying on hold. Now the restrictions have been lifted. Arizona Wing spokesperson Maj. Pat Brower said that one Valley-based pilot helped relay blood donated in Arizona to the New York City area.
-



Pat Shannahan/ The Arizona Republic

Layne Slapper, director of operations for the Arizona Wing of the Civil Air Patrol, joined the CAP in 1986, shortly after he earned his license as a private pilot. Below is the CAP insignia.





Civil Air Patrol Capt. William Gott (left) and Maj. John Gomes look over a map of southern Arizona in front of a CAP Cessna 182 at Scottsdale Airpark. Below is the CAP insignia.